

Title: Method and apparatus for distributing messages to mobile recipients

FIELD AND BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to a method and an apparatus for distributing communications to mobile recipients.

5 Such a method is known from European patent application 1 073 293 and from international patent application WO 01/50793. According to these known methods, mobile, addressable telecommunication devices, according to these examples mobile telephones, are registered in a database and, on the basis of data stored in the database, which determine for the respective
10 devices to what extent advertising messages may be sent to these devices, advertising messages to be distributed are sent to the respective devices.

A drawback of these manners of distributing advertising messages is that they are sent as separate communications, which involves relatively high costs, and the user of the device on which the message has been
15 received needs to separately operate and consult the device in reaction to signaling receipt of a message, to then conclude that the received communication merely contains an advertising message. A further drawback is that the advertising messages can only be distributed to devices of users who are registered, which limits the size of the population of users
20 to whom the advertisement can be sent.

A variant of such a method is described in international patent application WO 01/22748, according to which, by means of a mobile telecommunication device, a request is sent to receive messages, such as route information or information regarding places which are touristically or
25 otherwise important, depending on the occurrence of certain conditions, such as the position of the device, which may, for instance, have been

determined by means of an incorporated GPS receiver. Here, it is provided that communications are sent in combination with an advertising message to be distributed if space is present for this. Although this obviates the drawbacks that the advertising messages are separately sent and the user
5 needs to separately operate and consult his device when the advertising message is received, the population of users of mobile devices which can be reached with advertisements is further limited, because they can only be reached if they have requested conditional requests for sending information and if the respective condition which occasions the sending of information
10 occurs.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the invention to provide a solution which makes it
15 possible to bring messages to be distributed, such as advertising messages, to the notice of a larger population of users, while the relatively expensive sending and receiving of separate advertising messages, which involves bother for the recipient, is avoided.

According to the present invention, this object is achieved with a
20 method according to claim 1. For carrying out the method, the invention further provides an apparatus according to claim 8.

Because the messages to be distributed are added to communications coming from devices of users, the possibility is created to add messages with the consent of registered users, which messages, with the communications,
25 can also reach non-registered users, without the users to whom the messages are sent needing to separately operate their device for taking notice of the messages. The communications in which the messages can be included may, for instance, be SMS or MMS communications or communications composed according to another standard.

Special elaborations of the invention are set forth in the dependent claims. Further aspects, effects and details of the invention are described and elucidated on the basis of exemplary embodiments with reference to the drawing.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

Fig. 1 is a flow chart of a registration procedure and the upgrading of the account with a central system server;

10 Fig. 2 is a flow chart of the sending of a communication by use of software and/or hardware adapted for application of the invention, the addition of a commercial message and the delivery of the communication to a recipient;

15 Fig. 3 is a flow chart in accordance with Fig. 2, but it shows the sending of a communication without software or hardware adapted for application of the invention;

Figs. 4 and 5 show communication processing structures for application of a method according to Fig. 3, 4 and 6; and

20 Fig. 6 is a flow chart of the sending of a communication by use of software and/or hardware adapted for application of the invention, the addition of a message, the payment of an amount due for the sending with the added message and the delivery of the communication to a recipient.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

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The invention is first of all further elucidated in and by an example, which is based on collecting credits which can be used to send communications from one mobile device to another mobile device for free or at a reduced rate. However, it is also possible that the payment of the
30 sending of the communications takes place in a different manner. Credits

may, for instance, be available when buying a product, purchasing a service or taking out a subscription. The credits may, for instance, be issued by means of a scratch card or a code communicated in a different manner and may be registered in relation to the telephone bill of the user, for instance
5 via an Internet Portal where the user has at least filled out his name, address, city/town and mobile telephone number.

After registration, the 'saving account' of the user is kept. This makes it, for instance, possible for the user to send free, or at least sponsored, communications via his own mobile phone. A form of P2P (peer-to-peer)
10 advertising is created. When consumer A then sends a communication to consumer B via his mobile telephone, he can do this for free or at a reduced rate. The sponsor of the communication pays at least a part of the costs of the communication and in exchange, a short commercial message is added to the sent communication.

15 The commercial message coupled to the communication can be adjusted both with regard to text and layout to, for instance, the days of the week, to particular times of the day and/or to other particularities.

Additional payment by the user of amounts per communication to which a message has been added is also possible: the user registers, chooses,
20 for instance, an idealistic cause, and from that moment, the user and/or a third party pays an extra amount per communication for the benefit of the chosen good cause. The communication is provided with an addition related to the chosen good cause. The user may set an upper limit for his contributions. It is also possible that the added message is a service for
25 which the user pays, such as adding a map on which the momentary position of the device of the sender is shown or laying out the message (optionally with addition of standard details regarding the user).

The user may approach the server via various protocols, such as http, smtp, wap and gprs. Just to be perfectly clear: this is by no means a
30 limitative enumeration of the possibilities.

Here, a distinction is made between the concepts 'communication server' and '(central) system server'. The communication server is a conventional apparatus for the processing of digital communication traffic. On this communication server, each sent communication is temporarily kept for carrying out various checks. Examples of these checks are "billing" (payment between different providers and the users of the separate devices (prepaid or subscriber) registered with the respective communication server). The system server or, optionally, the communication server checks whether the user is registered in the sense that he can make use of the service of addition of sponsored messages or messages to be paid to his communications. By means of the system server, the communication is either sent on unmodified or sent on adjusted, in that a message is added, to the addressed device.

A further possibility to make a distinction between dedicated hardware and software and non-dedicated hardware and software. The device of the user may be designed such that the user who wants to send a communication can make a choice between sending the communication via a conventional ("non-dedicated") communication server and sending it via a communication server designed for adding messages ("dedicated").

If, for instance, an SMS communication is sent with a conventional mobile telephone, this takes place with a preset telephone number of the communication exchange of the provider of the user. By providing an extra option on the mobile telephone, so that, in addition to the standard telephone number of the provider, a second telephone number can be programmed of the "dedicated" communication server, it can be decided to have the adding of the message to the communication take place. The mobile telephone then has, for instance, two keys or menu options: one for conventional communication traffic and one for communication traffic with addition of messages by a third party, whether or not for a fee or at a charge.

In the present context, the non-processing of a communication means that the communication is not sent on to the recipient and that, for instance, the sender receives the communication back or receives an error message stating the reason of non-processing.

5 The example shown in Fig. 1 of a procedure for registering and upgrading credits/the account with a central system server starts at 100. Then, the user approaches the system server via an existing protocol and registers (step 101). The system server reads and compares the entered user information (step 102) and then checks whether the user is already known
10 (step 103). If this is not the case, a registration procedure 104 can be followed, in which the server asks the user for details such as user name and password, name, address, city/town, sex, age and (mobile) telephone number(s). When the user has been logged in, the server then shows the user the stored user profile and the number of credits the user has at his
15 disposal (step 105). Step 106 is the upgrading of the credits by means of entering obtained unique codes. Step 107 is the closing of this procedure.

 The example shown in Fig. 2 of adding a commercial message to the communication sent by the user starts with the user making, by means of a provision on his device, a choice for sending a communication via a
20 communication server or server structure designed for adding messages ("dedicated") (step 200). In 201, by means of his device, the user sends a communication addressed to a device of a recipient intended by him (peer-to-peer communication). This communication is received by the dedicated communication server (step 202). The dedicated communication
25 server reads user information included in the received communication, checks whether the sender of the communication is registered (step 203), and determines whether the communication is to be accepted. If the sender is not registered as a user of the invention, the communication is not processed and the non-processed procedure is followed (step 204). If the
30 sender is registered, the communication server checks the credits account of

the user (step 205). In case of an insufficient account, procedure 204 is again applicable and the message is not processed. If the account is sufficient, the communication server calculates if there is sufficient space for the message to be added. If there is insufficient space, the communication server may (if
5 necessary for the chosen medium) create an extra communication which is coupled to the original communication. As step 206, the communication server then adds a commercial message. This may take place on the basis of various conditions, such as the user profile, the type of credits, the location of the sender and the time of sending. The messages to be added, which,
10 incidentally, may have been automatically dynamically edited depending on conditions, have been laid down in advance by the manager of the server and are stored in a database coupled to the communication server. In other words, there is a limitative number of messages chosen by the manager from which the message to be added can be chosen. Depending on the
15 medium for sending chosen by the user, a message can be chosen which consists of text and/or image and/or sound. The communication server then deducts the used number of credits from the account of the user (step 210) and sends the processed and adjusted communication to the addressed party in a manner which is conventional per se (step 212).

20 The example shown in Fig. 3 of adding a commercial message to the communication sent by the user takes place by directing the message to the addressed party by means of a conventional (non-dedicated) communication server.

Here, the starting (step 300) of the procedure does not comprise the
25 choice for a dedicated communication server, but only the choice for the device function of sending a communication. In 301, the device of the user sends a communication addressed to the recipient intended by him (peer-to-peer communication). The communication also contains a message addition code which indicates that the communication is intended for addition of a
30 message by means of a system server communicating with the

communication server. This message addition code may, for instance, be a processing code included at the beginning of the communication, an address (registered as a number which can be chosen at a special rate or for free) or an element in the address. The user himself can choose to send a sponsored
5 SMS communication or one at his own expense by choosing or not choosing the message addition code.

This communication is received by the conventional (non-dedicated) communication server. The communication server recognizes the message addition code and sends the communication to the system server in reaction
10 to this. It is also possible to send all communications of users registered for message addition to the system server and to have the check for presence of a message addition code be carried out by the system server. The system server reads the communication (step 302) and checks whether the sender is registered (step 303). If the sender is not registered as a user, a
15 communication-not-processed procedure 304 is followed and a non-processed communication is sent to the sender via the communication server. If the sender is registered, the system server checks the credits account of the user (step 305). In case of an insufficient account, the non-processed procedure 304 is again applicable. If the account is sufficient, the system server checks
20 whether there is sufficient space for the commercial message to be added (step 308). If there is insufficient space, the system server may (if necessary for the chosen medium) create an extra communication which is coupled to the original communication for sending it in combination therewith. The system server then adds a message which is selected and optionally
25 automatically edited in a similar manner to the manner described in the above-described example. The system server then deducts the number of used credits from the account of the user (step 310) and sends the processed communication back to the non-dedicated communication server (step 311), with the address being the address of his message as indicated by the

sender. The communication server then sends the communication to the recipient in the conventional manner (step 312).

Fig. 4 shows an example of a server structure designed for processing communications basically according to the procedure shown in Fig. 2, where
5 the device 401 of the sender is a mobile telephone designed or at least programmed specially for allowing the addition of messages to communications ("dedicated").

It has been chosen to describe the implementation of the invention in the medium SMS as an example. In this process, the dedicated
10 communication server is referred to as the dedicated SMSC server. Via a preset on his mobile telephone 401 (number of user for instance: 06 11111111), the user sends an SMS communication addressed to the mobile telephone 405 of the recipient chosen by him having, for instance, number 06 22222222. Because the device 401 has chosen the number of a
15 dedicated SMSC server 402 for sending the communication, the SMS communication is directed to this dedicated SMSC server 402. As indicated in Fig. 2, this can carry out the checking and processing of the communications. Unlike what has been described in Fig. 2, it is, however, also possible that the dedicated SMSC server 402 leaves one or more of the
20 steps related to the processing of all received communications to the system server 403 coupled therewith, where the SMS communication is provided with a message in the manner described with reference to Fig. 2, and by means of information obtained from the database 404 coupled to the system server. After this, the processed communication is sent back to the dedicated
25 SMSC server, which then sends the communication on to the recipient 405 in a conventional manner.

Fig. 5 is an example of a server structure designed for processing communications according to the procedure shown in Fig. 2. Here, the device of the sender is a conventional (non-dedicated) mobile telephone 401
30 which, each time, sends communications of a particular type, according to

this example SMS communications, to a communication server 502 intended for processing both communications to be edited and communications not to be edited ("non-dedicated" communication server).

5 In this process, the communication server is referred to as the SMSC server 502. From his mobile telephone 501, the user sends an SMS communication addressed to the mobile telephone of the recipient chosen by him. The SMS communication is directed to the SMSC server 502. As described with reference to Fig. 3, the SMS communication is then, exclusively in reaction to a message addition code, directed to the system
10 server 503, where the SMS communication is provided with a message, depending on information obtained from the database 504 coupled to the system server 503. After this, the processed communication is sent back to the SMSC server 502, which then sends the communication to the recipient 505 in a conventional manner.

15 As a result of the registering, for at least a number of the devices or users, of data related to sent communications and the messages added to them for each device or each user separately, and the recording of data in at least one payment file depending on mutations of data related to sent communications and the messages added to them, the sending of
20 communications can be coupled to an account of the sender with a party which manages the message sending. This makes the addition of messages to communications for a fee or at a charge particularly well manageable. In particular for the relatively expensive sending of communications to and/or from mobile devices, it is advantageous to be able to manage the
25 contributions per user and per communication, for instance depending on expenses of the user with a paying or contributing party. The combined reward for custom and allowing messages makes a, for the user substantial, contribution towards the costs per communication of sending communications possible.

If selecting a message from a number of messages takes place depending on the code included by the user in the received message, the user can influence or determine the choice of the message, for instance taking into account the nature of the communication or the interests of the
5 recipient.

Fig. 6 is a further example of a procedure, where a message is added to the communication sent by the user at a charge for the sender.

Steps 600-604 and 608-610 and 612 are similar to steps 200-204 and 208-210 and 212 in Fig. 2. What is different is that, in step 605, the
10 maximum amount is read by the server and, in step 606, it is checked whether the maximum amount chosen in advance by the user has been reached or will be exceeded by processing the communication. If the amount would be exceeded, the non-processed procedure 604 would be put into operation.